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**FRANKFURTER BUCHMESSE:  
THE ITALIAN ROAD TOWARDS 2024**

In media partnership with



**FRANKFURTER  
BUCHMESSE**

18-22 OCTOBER 2023  
GUEST OF HONOUR SLOVENIA

FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2023  
18 - 22 OCTOBER

# 'Frankfurter Buchmesse is a social machine that inspires trust'

Seventy-five years after its first edition, Frankfurter Buchmesse continues to be an extraordinary meeting point for global publishing. The key elements, says Juergen Boos, are three: the political debate, the publishing rights exchange, and the cultural palimpsest.



Juergen Boos © Frankfurter Buchmesse

## **Frankfurter Buchmesse is 75 years old. What has happened in this time? How has the publishing industry changed? How has the fair changed?**

What began in 1949 with around 200 German publishing companies has quickly developed into the world's largest international book fair in the trading city of Frankfurt. This change cannot be explained by the economic dynamics in the book industry alone. For Frankfurter Buchmesse is also a venue for democratic discourse, is well-known for its impressive international author presence and is the most prolific networking platform in publishing.

The personal encounters between people are crucial. You have to think of Frankfurter Buchmesse as a social machine that inspires trust. And when this social machine stopped running for a short time during the pandemic - because it wasn't allowed to run - it became clear in the industry how indispensable such an international meeting like this is.

This applies to all three pillars of Frankfurter Buchmesse: for the cultural-political discourse in the halls. For the book fair marketplace, such as the LitAg, which remains the most important meeting place for agents even in digital times. And for the literary programme, with all its stages for authors and their readers, both on the fair grounds and in the city.

## **Frankfurter Buchmesse is the place where the global publishing industry discusses its most important topics. Which topics will be the focus of this edition of the fair?**

We won't wallow in nostalgia, but of course we want to celebrate the 75th fair together with the city of Frankfurt. In this context,

it is a great pleasure for me to welcome back Salman Rushdie as Peace Prize Laureate of the German Book Trade and also as a speaker to Frankfurt.

This year, for the first time, we will present Slovenian literature as part of the Guest of Honour: with over 70 authors, translators and poets in the Guest of Honour Pavilion. Among them is Slavoj Žižek, whom I hold in high esteem and who, according to the media, is considered the "most dangerous philosopher in the world" and who, for that very reason, enriches the book fair's discourse space.

For industry insiders from all over the world, we offer a professional programme: on site, hybrid and digital. This includes the tried and tested networking format The Hof, the first hybrid Frankfurt Rights Meeting and the Publishing Perspectives Forum on site. The panels will address pressing industry topics such as the use of AI in publishing, the meaning of Sensitivity Reading, and diversity in children's and young adult literature.

## **Every year, the fair selects a host country to establish a privileged relationship with its publishing industry and culture. This year it is Slovenia's turn: how do you work with this country? How do you generally approach cooperation with the Guest of Honour country?**

With the Guest of Honour programme, we want to connect the publishing and creative industries of the respective country more strongly internationally. We want to make new voices in the literature and culture of the host country more accessible to the reading public. We also aim to sustainably increase the rights trade and the number of translations. In principle, the conception, organisation and financing of the performance are in the hands of the Guest of Honour.

This year we are working closely with the Slovenian Book Agency, its director Katja Stergar and the programme curators Miha Kovač, Amalija Maček and Matthias Göriz. We are in close and frequent exchange with the Ministry of Culture as a financial supporter. Currently, we are also regularly on site in Slovenia, meeting authors, publishers and translators.

## **Next year it will be Italy's turn. Our publishing sectors, Italian and German, are already very close. How will we work together over the next 12 months to prepare for Frankfurter Buchmesse 2024?**

Yes, the relationship between Italian and German publishers is traditionally very close. We will also work with the Italian Guest of Honour team on specialist events to promote translation. And just recently, a very successful trip of Italian editors to Germany took place in terms of networking.

Now it's a question of Italian publishers already using this year's Frankfurter Buchmesse to further expand contacts. In 2024, the focus will then be on new publications by Italian authors in translation.

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interview with

**JUERGEN BOOS**

Director of Frankfurter Buchmesse

by **ALESSANDRA ROTONDO**

# 'I wish Italy could proudly mirror itself in Frankfurt 2024 experience'

FRANKFURT BOOK FAIR 2024  
16 - 20 OCTOBER

The last time was thirty-five years ago, with the Berlin Wall still standing.

The next will be in just one year's time, in October 2024. Italy that Mauro Mazza will bring to the Buchmesse as Guest of Honour will be bookish and polyphonic, cultured and pop, musical and artistic.

## Last time Italy was Guest of Honour at Buchmesse was in 1988: the world was different, and our country too. How would this change be narrated in Germany, in 2024?

To measure the distance that separates us from that 1988, in an era of continuous and very rapid change, we need only consider what we were like. There was the Berlin Wall, which would collapse a year later, and our foreign minister was that Giulio Andreotti who said he loved Germany so much that he preferred them to remain two. It was not one of his jokes; rather, it revealed the reluctance of the ruling class to encourage the turning points of History.

Our literature was flying on the wings of the resounding success of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*, and the Italian Pavilion at the 1988 Buchmesse was set up by architect Mario Garbuglia just like a medieval, magical place, complete with monastery and library. In October 2024, in the two thousand square meters of our Pavilion, Italy will be represented with the places and squares that Stefano Boeri is working on, an evocative declination of those *Roots in the Future* that is the title and the brand of our presence at the world's most important book fair.

## The imagination of a country abroad is a complex phenomenon. What role do you assign to books and how do you think Frankfurt 2024 can in the long run influence the world's image of our country?

I confess my deep love for the book, a feeling that sometimes borders on mania. I am not hostile to digital, but I struggle to read e-books, while I have been reading newspapers in online versions for years. In short, no more bundles of newspapers, but yes to the very many volumes that fill my home and my life.

I say this to emphasize the importance of the book as a tool for communication and knowledge. In Frankfurt the book will talk about us, it will tell about an Italy that intends to build a better future for itself, in a Europe that still struggles to think of itself as a unitary subject, bound by a common destiny. I would like that in the prestigious Frankfurt showcase, Italy could mirror itself, recognize itself and say with some pride: this is us.

## How will the success of Italian participation be measured?

Certainly, one indicator of success will be the increase in the number of books we are able to bring to translation into other languages, particularly German. The most recent Italian Publishers' Association survey on publishing import/export tells us that in 2020 there were almost 600 rights of Italian works acquired for translation and publication in Germany. We are talking about the fourth largest country for our export, after Spain, France and Poland. Overall, to be precise about the numbers, in 2020 our publishers bought 9,127 titles of foreign works and sold 8,586. We need to be able to bring this balance into the black, and we have a real hope that we can do it, thanks to "our" Frankfurt too.



Mauro Mazza

## Can you tell us at least three exponents of Italian culture who will participate in Buchmesse 2024?

We are working on a rich and necessarily complex program. I can say that, with all probability, we will have in Andrea Bocelli an absolute protagonist at the opening of the fair. In the inaugural moment the speakers will be Stefano Zecchi, Carlo Rovelli and Susanna Tamaro. Over the five days we will have the presence of nearly 100 of our authors. And then important art exhibitions. A relevant space will be given to eno-gastronomic culture, one of our excellences. We would like to worthily celebrate Puccini's centenary. We should also have a joyful soccer match between the Italian and German national teams with the protagonists of the 2006 World Cup.

## Over the past 20 years, Italian publishing has made great efforts to increase the sale of translation rights, and institutions have supported this effort too. As commissioner, what further steps do you think need to be taken?

The appointment with Frankfurt 2024 can push us to launch a more ductile and effective system of support for our books on the international market. I am thinking of increased resources and greater synergy between the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Culture, both of which are engaged in annual ad hoc grants. Harmonizing the initiatives would give us better results.

All the events, in Italy and abroad, in which Italy will participate in the coming months will in fact be preparatory to Frankfurt. We will experience these stages as moments in a single journey; coordinated steps for such an important goal.

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interview with  
**MAURO MAZZA**  
Governments special commissioner  
for the Frankfurt Book Fair 2024

by **SAMUELE CAFASSO**  
and **ALESSANDRA ROTONDO**

# Book publishing in Italy

**A**lso in 2022-2023, Italian publishing is confirmed as the country's first cultural industry with an **annual sales value of 3.388 billion euros (2022)**. It is now an established fact that a leap forward of nearly 300 million euros occurred after the pandemic: Italians are buying and reading more books in the post-pandemic world. AIE's data refer to 2022 for publishing as a whole and to the trade market alone for the first six months of 2023 and draw a leading industry in the Italian cultural landscape. Publishing is driving not only in terms of its ability to shape the national imagination, guide its education and training processes, and enable professional updating, but also in terms of its economic results.

The more than 3 billion euros of Italian publishing is higher than the 2.941 billion euros of pay TV, the 1.725 million of free-to-air TV (public service fee), the 1.721 billion of video games. More in detail, the result is the sum of the 1.881 billion euros of print books sold in bookstores, online stores, supermarkets, fairs and festivals, stationery stores, ebooks and subscriptions to audio platforms. **Educational publishing, on the other hand, is worth 776 million euros**, 340 million euros databases and Internet services, followed by the other sectors.

Trade publishing data in the first six months of 2023 provide us with the most up-to-date trends: the publishing industry is consolidating at the previous year's values, while copies sold are declining slightly. The two trends tell us two things. On the one hand, publishers have adjusted their cover prices after years of shrinking margins, but still price increases are below inflation. On the other hand, demand for reading is settling down, although it remains at very high levels.

Specifically, **in the first six months the value of sales in bookstores, online stores and supermarkets was 682 million**, up 0.7 percent from the previous year. 45.4 million copies were sold, a decrease of 0.7 percent, corresponding to 300 thousand fewer copies. The average cover price increase in sales was 1.5 percent, compared with inflation (June figure) of 6.4 percent.

**As for sales channels, the scenario is leveling off after the online boom in the pandemic year.** Indeed, in recent years, physical bookstores have regained some ground compared to online, which stands at 41.3 percent, after hitting a high of 48 percent in 2020. Chain and independent bookstores, from 57.7 percent in 2019 drop to 44.4 percent in 2020. They recover three points and stand at 47.8 percent in 2021 and continue their recovery in 2023 to reach 53.9 percent. Supermarkets stand at 4.8 percent in 2023.

**Even at the level of genres of books bought, the year of the pandemic was a watershed.** In 2023, fiction stands at 53 percent adding up Italian and foreign fiction (31 percent), comics (6 percent), and children's books (16 percent). Before the pandemic, fiction stood at 48%, compared to 52% for nonfiction. Today, on the other hand, nonfiction is at 47% as the sum of nonfiction (34%) and non-college manuals (13%).

**The ranking of the top ten best-selling books gives us a distinct clue to the variety of Italian publishing offerings:** they range from scientific non-fiction to genre fiction, via Prince Harry's world best seller to Italian literary fiction.

In fact, in first place we find *Spare* (Mondadori) followed by Tillie Cole's *Dammi mille baci* (Always Publishing) and Niccolò Ammaniti's *La vita intima* (Einaudi). Off the podium are *Le otto montagne* by Paolo Cognetti (Einaudi), followed by the romance *It Starts with Us* by Colleen Hoover (Sperling and Kupfer) and *Buchi bianchi*, by physicist Carlo Rovelli for Adelphi. In seventh place is *Atlas. The Story of Pa' Salt*, by Lucinda Riley (Giunti). In the last positions, finally, an Italian family saga, Francesca Giannone's *La portalettere* (Nord), Erin Doom's *Fabbricante di lacrime* (Magazzini Salani) and *Tre ciotole*, by Michela Murgia (Mondadori). **A ranking that also tells us a lot about new ways of book promotion:** there are successes born from self-publishing platforms, titles launched on TikTok, others more traditionally relaunched by the theatrical release of the film inspired by the book.

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